

# Shamal

## Sand Stone Stars

By Lisa Mara Batacchi  
Curated by Federica Forti

*Among the many civilizations of the past, there is a reference to the Zoroastrian-Mazda one that focuses on the cult of nature and on a dualistic vision: good / evil, human / inhuman, spiritual / material. (Lisa M. Batacchi)*

In a world where we can replace our physical presence and be constantly connected, will we restart traveling on the basis of old, yet completely new, time and space patterns? What will be the temporary architecture of travel? In the wake of new technological frontiers, will our clothing be made of smart fibers capable of feeding and caring for us? Will we be able to give up quantity without renouncing beauty? Will we be able to reconnect to heaven and earth?

It is not a coincidence that just this year, after a half-century of work, land artist Michael Heizer has completed his installation *City*, a visionary architecture reshaping the desert. Inspired by ancient pre-Columbian, Egyptian and Native-American constructions, the mega sculpture offers a visionary stage to reflect on a post-human world (R. Pepperell, 2005) and rethink projects like Nüwa City on Mars by ABIBOO architects.

A new important chapter is opening today in Dubai with the support of Polimoda: it is part of an ongoing and ambitious project by Lisa Mara Batacchi, an established visual artist and former Polimoda student.

The first step of the project was *Sand Storms in Medio Mundi*, created during the pandemic with the support of the Goethe Institute of Baku (Azerbaijan) and Tbilisi (Georgia) for the group show "Silk", curated by Alfons Hug, that opened during the 59th Venice Biennale "The Milk of Dreams" curated by Cecilia Alemani.

The work - two tapestries manually woven by the artist on a loom - was supposed to be created during a residency in Baku. Unable to move due to the Pandemic, Lisa Mara decided to combine Eastern thoughts and studies with the great Italian tradition for handmade craft. The artist worked with the restorers of the prestigious Opificio delle Pietre Dure in Florence, founded by Ferdinando I

de'Medici (1549-1609 Florence). Women and local communities holding a tangible and intangible heritage, contaminations between the artist and the artisans in a mutual exchange of ancient skills and creative visions, solutions combining hand-making and conceptual thinking.

Following the ancient tradition of prayer rugs, the tapestries are "cloud-portals" inviting to an introspective reflection but also to a connection with the Celestial Kingdom through the reference to *Medio Mundi* in the subtitle, inspired by a passage from *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth* (1960) by Henry Corbin. In this book, the author explained the existence - in the ancient Persian culture - of an intermediate world between the sensible and the intellectual, heaven and earth, to which man aspired to ascend.

Today we present *Shamal. Sand Stone Stars*, the second step of the project. Produced for the Dubai Design Week-*Design With Impact*, this site-specific environmental installation includes *Sand Storms In Medio Mundi* and invites the public to embark on an ancient journey into the future, traveling at light speed, yet carefully observing those details that the sand may hide, reveal and suddenly conceal.

The upheavals of Nature and the restlessness of current times - so fragile, precarious and emotionally chaotic - are visually translated by the artist into the image of a sand storm. *Shamal* is the hot, dry and dusty wind blowing from the northwest over Iraq, Iran, and the Arabian Peninsula. Lisa Mara is wishing for a possible positive regeneration in the aftermath of extreme events such as a sand storm: the rebirth of humankind for the sake of a greater spirituality and harmony.

In the urgency of the times we live in, among environmental, political, social and health crises, our security as humankind is more and more precarious and the gap between us and the other living species, us and the Planet, is evident. As a result, we need to go back to an ancestral contact between heaven and earth, between man and planet, between the Earth and the other planets.

*Shamal. Sand Stone Stars* offers the opportunity for an intimate and reflective moment for us to imagine our future life on Planet Earth through open questions. But it also aims to be a hub for exchange and sharing during the Design Week.

*Shamal. Sand Stone Stars* draws inspiration from the ancient ruins of Caucasian architecture, but it is also intended to create a mystic aura that allows the viewer to imagine future scenarios by entering its light fabric structure.

Inside are two precious tapestries, "*Meditating on Earth*" and "*The World is so far Reversed*", manually woven by the artist who has

used only raw and naturally dyed yarns (coffee, artichoke, tea), including some lacquer silks dating back to the 1930's.

You will embark on a "journey" through the precariousness of existence and its traces: the ephemeral fabric architecture is hanging, seemingly floating upward or downward at the mercy of a storm. But you will also experience the grandiosity of humankind who can create beauty and splendor.

Last but not least, a message calling for a reconnection with the divine, the supernatural, through the tapestries and their cloud-portal medallions, as well as for a return to "*seeing the stars*" (Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy, Inferno, XXXIV canto, line 139*), a reminder that it is "*love that moves the sun and the other stars*", quoting one of the most famous journeys in world culture.

Light can be (re)found through love that should unite people, not by making them all equal, but by preserving their social and cultural identities. These same ideas currently form the core of the 2030 Agenda and are incorporated and endorsed by Dubai, Creative City of Design, along with Polimoda who has just signed an agreement with the United Nations to support future generations towards a sustainable future in fashion industry.

At the heart of Lisa Mara Batacchi's research lays the exchange between cultural heritages to be preserved, just as you can see in these ocher-colored, irregularly textured tapestries, inspired by the sand continuously changing its form but not its appearance. These works are reminiscent of archaeological finds, slow erosions, wars, climate change, globalization.

Federica Forti, translated by Marisa Zanatta.

### **Short bio:**

Lisa Mara Batacchi (Florence 1980) studied Fashion Design at Polimoda and then worked as a designer, more significantly for Vivienne Westwood in London. She completed her training at the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence.

Her poetics brings to light emotional bonds between individuals and society documenting both a personal and a collective identity in relation to local communities with their traditions, stories and ambitions as well as transnational issues. By using an anthropological approach in the analysis of a specific context, her works capture the most subtle variations deriving from dreams, symbologies, numbers, and unintentional daily actions.

She creates devices that can lead, like a talisman, to new forms of interactions and thoughts, especially in the delicate boundaries between earth-humankind-cosmos. Since 2013, she has focused more deeply on the recovery of ancestral textile techniques, related to rituals and traditions that are slowly but dramatically disappearing in the globalized culture of the 21st century, both in the East and the West, working between Italy, India, China and Mongolia.

In the past two years (2020-2022) she has learnt the art of tapestry thanks to expert restorers and textile artisans. This generated her latest project "Sand

Storms in Medio Mundi" produced by the Goethe Institut of Tbilisi (GE) and Baku (AZ) for *Silk*, a group exhibition curated by Alfons Hug, presented during the 59th Venice Biennale at GAD - Giudecca Art District. This ongoing project has been recently displayed in the solo show curated by Lottozero at Museo Mercantile during BAW - Bolzano Art Weeks as well as at the Textile Art Biennial "The Soft Revolution" curated by Barbara Pavan and hosted by Museo del Tessile in Busto Arsizio.

Her works have been displayed in solo and collective exhibitions including: 2nd Something Else - Off Biennale in Cairo, Manifesta 12 collateral event in Palermo, MAD - Murate Art District in Florence, Art & Globalization Pavillion during the 57th Venice Biennale, 4th LAM - Biennial Land Art Mongolia in Ulaanbaatar, TAC - Textile Arts Center in New York, Riss(e) Zentrum in Varese, Villa Pacchiani in Pisa. She was awarded, among others, the Italian *Movin'up* prize that has supported her residency and personal show at Clark House Initiative in Bombay in 2015.

In the past few years she has held workshops, lectures and educational projects in collaboration with Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi in Florence (IT), Arts Can Do - ACAF Foundation in Shanghai (CN), Siena Art Institute (IT), Lottozero in Prato (IT). Her latest research was included in *Global Identities. Postcolonial and Cross-Cultural Narratives* published by Mousse Publishing, 2019. Her long-term project *The Time of Discretion* was published as a monograph by Silvana editoriale in 2020 and it generated her first short film, with the same title, that was selected and screened in various international film festivals.